

Ombudsman Commends LHDA's Community Engagement During Polihali Site Visit

The Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) continues to strengthen its commitment to transparency, accountability, and community engagement through high-level stakeholder interactions linked to the implementation of the Polihali Dam project.

In a recent visit to Mokhotlong, the LHDA Chief Executive, Tente Tente, hosted a delegation from the Office of the Ombudsman, led by Advocate Tlitliso Polaki. The engagement formed part of the Authority's broader strategy to foster openness and strengthen institutional oversight as the multi-billion maloti infrastructure project progresses.



The visit provided the Ombudsman's office with a comprehensive overview of ongoing developments at the Polihali construction sites. The delegation toured key components of the project, including the dam wall construction area and the transfer tunnel—critical infrastructure that will ultimately channel water to the Katse Dam as part of Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. The LHDA Project Management Unit, Polihali Operations Branch Manager, the Divisional Manager Phase II and Polihali Operations Branch Senior Officers on site outlined progress milestones, safety measures, and the technical complexity involved in constructing infrastructure in the highlands' challenging terrain.



Beyond the engineering works, the visit placed strong emphasis on the human dimension of the project. The delegation was taken to several LHDA-supported livelihood improvement initiatives, including the Ramonakalali Innovation Hub. This facility is designed to equip local communities in Mokhotlong with practical skills, entrepreneurial opportunities, and sustainable income-generating activities. The hub reflects LHDA's broader objective of ensuring that infrastructure development translates into long-term socio-economic benefits for host communities.

A key highlight of the visit was a direct engagement session between the Ombudsman and community members affected by the project. This platform allowed residents to voice their experiences, concerns, and expectations regarding compensation, relocation, and access to opportunities arising from the project. Such engagements are increasingly seen as vital in large-scale developments, where balancing national benefits with local impacts remains a delicate but essential task.

In her remarks, Adv. Polaki expressed satisfaction with the level of engagement demonstrated by LHDA. She commended the Authority for creating platforms that allow affected communities to participate in discussions about the project. However, she also underscored the importance of maintaining momentum in addressing community needs. She urged LHDA to continue expediting compensation payments and to ensure that affected households receive timely and clear information.



“The project must continue to prioritise consistent and meaningful engagement with communities, particularly around opportunities available to them,” she noted, highlighting the need for inclusivity and transparency. Responding to these concerns, Mr. Tente reaffirmed LHDA’s commitment to its social obligations. He emphasised that compensation and livelihood restoration are not peripheral aspects of the project, but central responsibilities.

“As LHDA, we remain committed to ensuring that affected communities receive their compensation on time and that they are fully informed throughout the process,” he said. “It is our duty to ensure that the project contributes to the improvement of livelihoods and leaves a positive legacy for the people of Mokhotlong and beyond.”

The Polihali Dam forms a cornerstone of Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, a bi-national initiative between the governments of Lesotho and South Africa. While the project is expected to significantly boost water security and generate revenue for Lesotho, engagements such as this underscore the importance of aligning infrastructure development with social accountability.

As construction progresses, LHDA’s continued collaboration with oversight bodies like the Ombudsman signals a growing emphasis on governance, responsiveness, and community-centred development—ensuring that the voices of those most affected remain at the heart of the project.